

Page 2 HEARING re Telephonic Conference (ECF #3539 and #3783) HEARING re Letter: Letter Dated May 1, 2020 on behalf of Community Unit School District 300 in Response to Letter from Luke Barefoot, dated April 27, 2020, Requesting Telephonic Status Conference (related document(s)7872) Transcribed by: Sonya Ledanski Hyde

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PROCEEDINGS

MR. BAREFOOT: Good morning. This is Luke

Barefoot from Cleary Gottlieb for Transform Holdco for the

11:30 status conference.

MR. FLOREY: Good morning. This is Ken Florey and Katie Zumalt, on behalf of Robbins Schwartz, and we represent School District 300.

CLERK: Good morning, everyone. My name is Ry.

I'm one of Judge Drain's clerks. I understand we have a conference here for 11:30. The Judge just finished his a.m. calendar, so he will be joining us right around 11:30 in just a few short minutes. So please bear with us. In the meantime, I just want to thank everyone for your cooperation (indiscernible).

Please be mindful (indiscernible) if you haven't participated via Court Solutions before, please be mindful of your mute buttons. Keep your (indiscernible) on mute when not speaking to avoid any background noise. And please make sure to unmute yourself when you do speak. And each time you do speak, please make sure to state your name so that that way, the Judge, all participants and (indiscernible) the recorder for the transcriber can keep track of who is speaking. Thank you very much once again. And the Judge shall be (indiscernible) shortly.

MR. BAREFOOT: Thank you very much.

1 THE COURT: Hello. This is Judge Drain, and we're 2 here in In Re Sears Holding Corp., et al, and more 3 specifically, on a conference prompted by a letter dated April 27, 2020 from counsel to Transform Holdco LLC. Mr. 4 Barefoot requested this conference. I have also reviewed a 5 6 letter dated May 1, 2020 from counsel for Community Unit 7 School District 300, (indiscernible) the School District, by 8 Mr. Florey, in response to Mr. Barefoot's letter. 9 I don't know if there are any updates from those two letters that I should be told about. Otherwise, we can 10 11 just proceed with the conference. MR. BAREFOOT: Good morning, Your Honor. This is 12 13 Luke Barefoot, from Clearly Gottlieb, for Transform Holdco 14 LLC and its affiliates. I do not believe that there are any 15 updates, and the exchange of letters that you just 16 referenced accurately sets out the parties' existing 17 positions. 18 THE COURT: Okay. MR. FLOREY: Good morning, Judge. This is Ken 19 20 Florey, from Robbins Schwartz, on behalf of School District 21 300. And I agree with Mr. Barefoot that there are no 22 updates to my letter either. 23 THE COURT: Okay. Very well. So I've reviewed 24 the orders. Obviously, there's a lot of history to this 25 underlying matter. But most importantly, there is the

amended stipulation and order that I so ordered back on October 23, 2019. I had also separately entered an extension order.

But I think the October 2019 stipulation is the key document, and it very clearly states, as I think the parties recognize, that I so ordered a stipulation that stated that, "In the interest of efficiency, until such claims are adjudicated in the Illinois action" -- which we all know what that action is -- "the Court shall defer ruling on the issue of whether the Debtors or any liquidating trust or liquidating trustee may assume, or assume or assign, the EDA agreement, pursuant to Section 365 of the Bankruptcy Code, and any disputes involving cure claims associated with the EDA agreement."

Notwithstanding that language, Transform seeks in its letter that I, "determine certain threshold bankruptcy issues" raised by the objection to the assumption and assignment of the EDA agreement to Transform. It then lists those three issues, the first being whether the School District's release or waiver of certain liabilities against the Debtors under the amended stipulation and order would constitute a release or waiver of the same liabilities by the School District against Transform, to the extent Transform becomes the Debtors' assignee of the EDA agreement.

Two, assuming arguendo that any provisions of the EDA agreement limit Transform's rights to become the developer under the EDA agreement, whether such provisions are unenforceable and the assignment provisions under Section 365(f) of the Bankruptcy Code.

And three, to the extent the School District intends to assert this objection, whether the EDA agreement is a financial accommodation under Section 365(c)(2) of the Bankruptcy Code.

So, as I understand it, those are the issues that Transform would like me, the bankruptcy Judge, to determine, either before or on a parallel track with the Illinois litigation.

Is there anything else that you would like me to interpret, Mr. Barefoot, or just those three issues?

MR. BAREFOOT: Thank you, Your Honor. Luke

Barefoot, from Cleary Gottlieb. Our request is limited to those three issues.

THE COURT: Okay.

MR. BAREFOOT: I would be happy to explain the reasons why, notwithstanding the language that the parties negotiated in the stipulation and order, we believe that circumstances have changed and that resolution of these threshold issues on a parallel track -- just to clarify, we're not requesting any sort of a stay or precedence over

the Illinois action, but why, particularly given the ongoing delays and the COVID situation that has impacted the Illinois Court's ability to move forward, we believe that parallel resolution of these issues could materially progress the parties' resolution of these issues, and substantially limit, if not moot, any of the issues that the Illinois Court would have to determine.

THE COURT: Well, clearly, if I determined that 365(f) did not override rights to assign the EDA agreement, separate and apart from the cure issue, or whether I determine that the EDA agreement is a financial accommodation, that would preclude assignment.

I don't know whether either of those issues has actually been asserted or is intended to be asserted, though, as part of the objection.

MR. BAREFOOT: Your Honor, both of those were asserted in the objection. And just to follow along with Your Honor's logic on points two and three, which would be determinative, issue number one, if Transform is correct in its interpretation of the stipulation and order that this Court retains jurisdiction over, that would take off of the table all of the cure cost claims from 2017 and prior, and avoid the need for nitty-gritty discovery and thorny issues of state law on employment numbers going back half a decade.

THE COURT: Okay. Let's leave aside number one

Page 10 1 for the moment. On two and three, are these points that the 2 School District intends to pursue? MR. GENSBURG: Good morning, Your Honor. Matt 3 Gensburg, on behalf of the School District. Both of those 4 5 points have been raised in the objections to assumption and 6 assignment, along with others. 7 THE COURT: Okay. So I guess that's a yes. 8 MR. GENSBURG: That is a yes, Your Honor. 9 THE COURT: I'm not asking you to waive them. 10 just wanted to know, because their couched in somewhat 11 uncertain -- you know, to the extent that, assuming arguendo 12 that -- so it wasn't clear to me whether this is still a 13 live issue. 14 It would appear to me that those two issues are 15 gatekeeping issues, and they're not really the issues that 16 the Illinois action was intended to deal with. They're not 17 teed up in the Illinois action at all. So to me, I suppose those -- I mean, both sides --18 19 MR. GENSBURG: Judge --THE COURT: -- both sides could avoid extensive 20 21 time and expense if I ruled on those two issues in the 22 School District's favor, for example. MR. GENSBURG: Judge, again, Matt Gensburg. I 23 24 understand the logic of the Court. But let me explain to 25 the Court where the School District is coming from.

One of the fundamental components that the School
District has been trying to deal with is trying to avoid the
cost and expense of duplicative litigation. And the School
District --

THE COURT: Well, this is not duplicative. How is this duplicative, these two issues?

MR. GENSBURG: Well, for example, the issue of whether the Sears or Transform Holdco, or whoever tries to take over this agreement, complies with the terms of the agreement, is going to drive largely whether they assume, elect to assume, or reject the agreement.

anticipate it will, that there's a certain minimum full-time job equivalent requirement that exists, that Sears has not met that, is not meeting it, there's a strong possibility that Transform Holdco's not going want to even assume this agreement, because the economic benefit of this agreement simply doesn't exist anymore. And in that situation, there's no need to deal with the 365(c)(1) issue or the 365(c)(2) issue.

THE COURT: Now, are those issues issues that involved any facts, any discovery, or can they be dealt with on review of the contract and applicable law?

MR. GENSBURG: It's going to involve review of the underlying statute, for example, with respect to 365(c)(1),

the anti-assignment language. It's going to deal with the financial combination, understanding the nature and extent of the contract and agreement between the parties with the legislation the EDA agreement contemplated in terms of the tax rebates, and the financial accommodations associated therewith, what the intent of the legislature was in both scenarios.

THE COURT: So --

MR. BAREFOOT: Your Honor, Luke Barefoot, from Cleary Gottlieb. From our perspective, neither of these issues require any discovery. I don't disagree with the School District counsel's position that these would require examination of the legislation and the impact of that under 365(f) and 365(c)(2), in terms of looking at the agreement. But I don't think any of those require factual discovery between the parties.

THE COURT: Well, the only person, or the only side, that is really materially advanced by my determination of these two issues, I would think would be this School District, right? Because if Transform wins on both of these issues, it still has the other issues to deal with. And I would think I could deal with these two issues rather quickly.

But if the School District doesn't want to have that answer right away, I'm not sure why -- you know, that's

just another, you know, maybe a month after you get the answer on the cure amount.

MR. BAREFOOT: Your Honor, this is Luke Barefoot.

Just to respond to that point, if these issues are decided in the School District's favor, it would eliminate the possibility for Transform to reasonably have this agreement and continue to pursue having this agreement assumed and assigned.

So from Transform's perspective, and keeping in mind that under the assumption and assignment procedures order, Transform has the ability at any time to withdraw its designation of assumption and assignment, up until a final order is entered by this Court. We're trying to avoid a lot of potentially thorny and extensive litigation in Illinois, if that litigation is all for naught because of special bankruptcy issues that render that litigation irrelevant.

THE COURT: Okay.

MR. GENSBURG: Your Honor, Matt Gensburg. But the fundamental problem here is this, is that in the stipulation and order, this is exactly what Paragraph 7 intends to avoid. The School District gave its counsel, Ken Florey, Kory Atkinson and myself, Allen Kadish, directions when we were negotiating the stipulation and order, that one of the things they wanted was to prioritize the litigation, and that the litigation would not take place in two forums

simultaneously. That the litigation would take place in Illinois, and only thereafter, if it was still relevant, that the issues of assumption and assignment would we come back to the Bankruptcy Court.

And the language in the stipulation and order, which was a product of substantial negotiation and give and take is abundantly clear on this point. You know, we gave up our right and claim to 2017 EDA funds. We gave up certain claims against the bankruptcy estate. We withdrew with prejudice our objections to the plan confirmation, withdrew with prejudice our ballots, and in return, Sears, you know, forgave its interest in the 2018 EDA funds. And in return, it was agreed that the Court would defer ruling on the assumption and assignment issues under 365.

THE COURT: Okay.

MR. GENSBURG: And --

THE COURT: Well, I understand all of that. And I also understand that ultimately, this is a -- if this were pressed, this would be a motion under Rule 60, which is hard to win. I get all of that.

Let me turn to the first point. This just depends on the wording of the stipulation, right? Whether the School District's release or waiver of certain liabilities against the Debtors under the amended stipulation and order would constitute a release or waiver of the same liabilities

Page 15 1 by the School District against Transform? 2 MR. GENSBURG: It does, Your Honor. 3 THE COURT: All right. So, to me -- look, I appreciate I signed this, but there is no... To me, this is 4 5 the parties' stipulation, which I so ordered. It's really a 6 contract. I don't see why if Transform wants to rely on 7 this language in this stipulation, it can't, in the Illinois action, make a motion for judgment on the pleadings or for 8 9 partial summary judgment on this issue. MR. BAREFOOT: Your Honor, Luke Barefoot from 10 11 Cleary --12 THE COURT: Hold on. 13 MR. BAREFOOT: If I could just respond to that point, please? 14 THE COURT: Okay. 15 16 MR. BAREFOOT: I think the issue with that, with 17 our potentially moving and having the Illinois Court 18 interpret the stipulation and order is that this Court retained jurisdiction over the implementation, 19 20 interpretation and enforcement of that order. So it's not 21 clear to us that the Illinois Court is the correct forum for 22 that issue. And obviously, the other two --THE COURT: Well, it's not exclusive jurisdiction. 23 24 I mean, I don't -- it's just an agreement. 25 MR. BAREFOOT: Understood, Your Honor. I think

Pq 16 of 33 Page 16 1 just carrying on with that, the other two issues are core 2 bankruptcy issues that I don't think it's anyone's 3 contemplation would ever be brought before the Illinois Court, or could make --4 5 THE COURT: No, those two aren't. No, I'm just 6 talking about number one. The other two --7 MR. BAREFOOT: Understood. 8 THE COURT: The other two, based on my reading of 9 the stipulation, which covered -- it referred to the 10 objection to the (indiscernible) assignment were to be 11 deferred, not that the School District would be dealing with those in the Illinois action. 12 13 MR. BAREFOOT: Your Honor --14 THE COURT: But this one, as far as the amount 15 owing, I don't understand why it isn't a defense that the 16 amount isn't owing, because it was raised in a stipulation 17 and order. Now, I understand that the School District will 18 point to other provisions of the order, the stipulation and order, that say it's not waived. But I don't -- this one --19 20 I'm not offended by the Illinois Court dealing with this. 21 And it doesn't need any discovery to deal with it. It can 22 just interpret the language. MR. SCHEIN: Your Honor, if I may, this is Michael 23

Schein, Vedder Price, on behalf of the Village. A couple of

things for Your Honor that we wanted to clarify. As it

24

relates to this stipulation and order, it was very clear, these negotiations that went on were between the Debtors and the School District. And as the stipulation especially shows, the Village was not bound by Paragraph 7 at the District sites; that the only thing the Village was a part of -- and it is important for the Village here, because the EDA is (sound drops) the EDA subsumes the Village -- is that we only became a part of this stipulation for purposes of making the distributions, since we were holding the money for which the Debtors and the School District were settling and compromising claims, rights and otherwise. So we don't believe Paragraph 7 binds on us from the purpose of how the EDA is handled.

Secondly, Your Honor, I think it's important for the Court to understand what's actually going on in the Illinois litigation, because as Your Honor remembers, when you first entered that abstention order, that was when the School District told the Court that they could be back and be done at the State Court in 60 days. We're clearly hardly 60 days, putting aside the impact of the pandemic.

And I think what is important for the Court to understand is we are still very far behind on complaints.

There have been only two -- there have been four amended complaints filed by the District, Your Honor, over time, all of which were required by the State Court motions for leave

to file. And all of the amendments have not been caused by any delay of any of the other parties but the School District, who has been required, among other things, to add necessary parties, and who have actually changed that original complaint from a declaratory relief to actually claims specifically against the Village for damages and otherwise.

So the litigation in the State Court has very much changed from where it started. And we believe that these issues raised by Transform's counsel can very cleanly be handled here, especially in light of the fact, Your Honor, as you may know, that the Circuit Court has further delayed even a hearing on leave for the District to file its fourth amended complaint. And that hearing, which was currently scheduled for May 26, has been delayed for another 30 days for a date for which we are still waiting from the State Court judge.

So those delays impact all the parties, including the Village, as well as Transform and others. And we believe that Transform's efforts to move this in parallel track is an efficient way for all the parties to handle these discrete issues.

MR. FLOREY: Judge, this is Ken Florey.

THE COURT: It may be efficient, but I go back to the language in the order. I mean, it was the School

Page 19 1 District that filed an objection to assumption an 2 assignment, right? 3 MR. SCHEIN: Correct. 4 THE COURT: Okay. So --5 MR. SCHEIN: But those issues sit before Your 6 Honor as part of a cure objection and can be handled before 7 Your Honor. And again, the deal for the order of the 8 litigation was an agreement between the Debtors and the 9 School District. It was not --10 THE COURT: I'm sorry --11 MR. SCHEIN: -- a binding agreement. 12 THE COURT: I was just -- that's why I began this 13 call way I did. I was told by the School District that this 14 objection to the assumption and assignment includes or 15 implicates issues under 365(f) and 365(c)(2). Right? 16 MAN: And (c)(1), Judge. 17 THE COURT: Well, okay. But I'm saying that the 18 objection isn't just a cure objection. It covers the whole 19 thing. 20 MR. BAREFOOT: Your Honor, this is Luke Barefoot. 21 If I could briefly address Your Honor's point concerning the 22 procedural posture, that this amounts to a revisiting of the stipulation and order. We understand and accept that 23 24 perspective. 25 But I think it's important to keep in mind that

the stipulation really is in the nature of a consent decree. It's the agreement of the parties, rather than some course of law or ruling of the Court that creates all of the obligations in the stipulation and order. And under Rule 60(b)(5), there has been a fundamental change in circumstances between now and October in terms of our expectations on the length of time that it would take to make progress on the issues that were teed up in the Illinois action, as well as the nature of those issues.

There have been four amended complaints since that time, which we wouldn't have anticipated, all of which have delayed the progress of that litigation and changed the nature of the relief that's been sought. And there's also obviously been the impact of the pandemic, which none of us could have predicted, that has left further ambiguity about when the State Court action will ever even progress again.

So I do understand and accept Your Honor's observations and the School District's position. But I believe that under 60(b)(5), we have made out a case for an amendment based on the fact that an enforcement of what the parties had memorialized at that time would no longer be equitable.

MR. FLOREY: Judge, this is Ken Florey, on behalf of School District 300. Both counsels are being disingenuous in describing their part in the delay in the

Illinois case. We have detailed in our letter, and I'm not going to go into it anymore, but I'm not just going to sit here quiet and listen to their claims that the slowdown in the Illinois case has nothing to do with either of those two parties' strategy in litigating the case, as well as you pointed out they could simply file a motion for partial summary judgment on the first issue that they brought before this Court and get a determination by the State Court.

THE COURT: I don't really have an answer yet on that point, Mr. Barefoot.

MR. BAREFOOT: I do have an answer, Your Honor. First off, I don't want to belabor the Court with a hesaid/she-said on the play-by-play in the State Court litigation. But two relevant observations.

First, you know, Transform has met every deadline imposed by the Court in Illinois. Transform answered the amended complaint. It's only been since then that there have been a second, a third, and a fourth amended complaint, that the Court in Illinois has required a ruling on the leave to amend in order to have those progressed.

I also wanted to note that the School District suggests that the Circuit Court requested that the parties agree on discovery. What actually happened was that the Circuit Court merely observed that the parties could engage in discovery, and both Transform and the Village have not

agreed to proceed with discovery until we have an operative complaint before us.

I also just want to just reiterate that I think we all would agree that this action may have progressed, and we might have an operative complaint, and might have an opportunity to raise a motion for judgment on the pleadings or a motion to dismiss to tee up the first issue. But we didn't have that opportunity because we don't have an operative complaint before us or a schedule for responding to that complaint.

THE COURT: Okay. Well, I'm not going to undo the order at this point. If there is a further delay into July of the filing of, as you phrased it, an operative complaint, then you can renew your request. But it seems to me that the core cure issue can be addressed, as point one states, it could be addressed at least, by either Court, and might as well have it be consistent with the -- what was contemplated by the stipulation and order, which is that those underlying cure issues, which include waiver, be decided by the Illinois Court.

As far as the other two points are concerned, I can see a basis for efficiency here. But on the other hand, I don't think it's enough to overcome the sanctity of the stipulation and order, which can be overcome under appropriate circumstances, but I don't just see it here.

And as far as the various amended complaints are concerned, it strikes me that if this issue had been teed up before me, those same issues might have arisen, involving other parties than who were before me at the time, at which, reading between the lines, is why there were that many amended complaints.

so this is just a conference. It's on the record and you can get a transcript from the Clerk's office, or make a request from the Clerk's office. But it's not with regard to a motion. But I'm giving you a pretty clear signal that if you made a motion for relief under Rule 60, I wouldn't grant it under these facts. Now, they may change. It may be that there is still a major problem with the complaint, or the Illinois Court just is sitting on it. I'm sure they're dealing with reopening issues, just as our courts are.

And that's another issue for both of you. I am incredibly busy right now. This will be my second 12-hour day of court time. And your likelihood of getting a hearing on any of these three matters probably would be in August at the earliest.

So I think you will get a prompt answer on points two and three, if and when it's warranted. But you're just as likely to get a prompt answer on one from the Illinois Court as from me. And under the stipulation, it should be

Page 24 from the Illinois Court, unless something dramatically changes. So I'm going to ring off now. I have to prepare for my 2:00 hearing and read a disclosure statement that just came in last night that's about 200 pages long. So I'll talk to you then. Goodbye. All: Thank you, Judge. (Whereupon these proceedings were concluded at 12:10 PM)

Page 25 1 CERTIFICATION 2 3 I, Sonya Ledanski Hyde, certified that the foregoing 4 transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. 5 Digitally signed by Sonya Ledanski Sonya Hyde 6 DN: cn=Sonya Ledanski Hyde, o, ou, Ledanski Hyde email=digital@veritext.com, c=US 7 Date: 2021.07.08 14:57:03 -04'00' 8 Sonya Ledanski Hyde 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 Veritext Legal Solutions 21 330 Old Country Road 22 Suite 300 23 Mineola, NY 11501 24 25 Date: May 13, 2020

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